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# Representing **children's rights** from discussion through to illustration and interpretation

RESEARCH REPORT: NOVEMBER 2019



**THE OPEN UNIVERSITY'S  
CHILDREN'S  
RESEARCH  
CENTRE**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



The Open  
University

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## Foreword

On the 30th anniversary of the landmark United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), I warmly embrace this publication. Thirty years on, children and young people face a very different world with perpetual – and evolving – challenges. If we are serious about respecting children's rights, then we must go directly to children themselves to find the answers. And we must do so with some humility. Our adult superiority, our adult filters and our adult baggage get in the way of genuinely listening. J M Barrie's quote 'I am not young enough to know everything' should be a constant reminder of that. Empowering young people to show us their worlds and understand the lived experiences through their eyes is fundamental in this regard. And this is precisely what the Open University's Children's Research Centre, in partnership with Amnesty International UK, has done. This is a powerful piece of research that puts children and young people in the driving seat and illuminates the path we must follow in the decades to come.

Mary Kellett, Vice-Chancellor, The Open University and founder of the  
Children's Research Centre



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## Executive summary

This report presents the findings of research undertaken by the Open University's Children's Research Centre with groups of children and young people (C&YP) across nine project settings in England and Wales to capture their views and understandings about rights. Thirty years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and it was opened for signature on 20th November 1989. Currently, 195 countries have ratified the Convention and are bound to it by international law. Amnesty International UK (AIUK) is commissioning two new books, one for children and one for young people. The purpose of the books is to inform and empower C&YP to claim their rights, and enable and encourage adults to uphold the rights of the child as outlined in the UNCRC. C&YP are the most disadvantaged, on average, of all rights holders and face most structural injustice. They are often seen as appendages of adults, rather than people entitled to equal dignity and rights. The UNCRC applies to all children equally; children have different experiences of their rights being upheld, but they may share common feelings when rights are violated. Therefore, the aim of this research was to make visible the views of C&YP about their rights and for their voices to be at the heart of the book creation process.

As the Convention reflects on its thirtieth anniversary, this opportunity for debate and discussion on children's rights is timely. A guiding principle for the design of this study is the recognition of rights as something that cannot be precisely categorised or easily granted, but are fluid, complex, and socially constructed. Such fluidity necessitates a participatory research approach that is responsive to dynamic childhood practices and recognises the different ways in which potential views are shared. Consequently, this research employed a multimodal research design, utilising focus-group interviews, young researcher projects, role-play and drama, and photo-elicitation as the means to engage with and listen to diverse groups of C&YP. The aim was to use the multimodal activities as a stimulus for conversation and to provide opportunities for the C&YP to contribute to a shared narrative about rights within the context of their own lives. The research also gathered C&YP's picture book preferences, specifically the kinds of images that attract or interest them.

Over the Autumn and Spring of 2018/19, the Children's Research Centre commenced an initial phase of research with C&YP in England and Wales. The participants were recruited through a range of settings, including schools, national youth organisations, UNICEF Rights Respecting schools, rights-based charities, cultural organisations, and advocacy groups. The research directly involved 114 C&YP, with a further 100 children indirectly involved through child-led research in a school setting. The settings engaged a diverse range of participants, including C&YP from: low socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic minority communities, vulnerable groups, rural communities and those living in urban and peri-urban environments; and included C&YP with learning difficulties and care-experienced C&YP.

The findings of this research reflect children and young people's understanding and experiences of rights in the 21st century. Four specific themes emerged from the data analysis and coding process and focused on the ways in which C&YP spoke of rights through the lens of personal, relational, institutional and global concerns. Across the themes, the six most frequently occurring codes were: expression and difference; safety and protection; equality, fairness and diversity; education and



learning; health and hygiene; and the environment. Expression and difference related to the C&YP's personal autonomy and the ways in which they associated the term 'rights' with 'fair' and 'fairness', as well as with 'right' and 'not right'. The most common themes discussed within an institutional context illustrating how rights are upheld within society were: safety and protection; equality; fairness and diversity; and, education and learning. The theme of the environment was reflected through the lens of global impact of climate change and the sustainability.

The C&YP's nuanced responses to discussions about rights and how they affected their lives echoes the complexity of the rights agenda. C&YP highlighted an active relationship between rights, reflected through the prioritisation of rights; for example, some C&YP prioritised their rights to have friends and to learn over their right to privacy, while others prioritised the right to shelter over the right to education. The research highlights the ongoing debate that rights are context specific: as one child emphasised, 'What's important to me might be different to what's important to someone else ... to someone who's getting beaten up, safety is the most important thing.'

In relation to visual literacy, the C&YP in this research favoured positive images of happiness and pictures that have a storytelling element to them, especially those based on superheroes and magical or cartoon images. The C&YP liked images that promote friendship and provide positive role models of disability, as well as images that represent their lives and enable them to identify themselves and their families. They are attracted to and responsive to visual images that promise change, possibility and potential empowerment, in contrast to their concerned reactions to images of segregation or rights denied. For some of the older C&YP in this research, images of rights not being respected are more powerful. Empowering C&YP through visual means has the potential to educate and inform them about the role of rights that are specific and appropriate to their lives.

Across the nine project settings, the data illustrates the intertwined relationships across the various articles of the UNCRC (as envisioned by its original authors). The C&YP people in this study understand their rights as active entitlement that changes over time and according to age and context. Their conversations and activities reveal the evolving nature of their understanding of the concepts of rights, even though they may not always recognise their own individual rights as embodied in the UNCRC.

The UNCRC was devised through a collaborative process across governments, but C&YP were not central to the consultation process. It was for the adults to determine the rights that would uphold the protection and safety of all C&YP. This contrasts with the principal aim of this research, which was to keep at its heart children and young people's voices. A key outcome of working in this way is a commitment to ongoing dialogue and consultation with C&YP, thus providing an authentic opportunity to inform the creative space where rights might be reimagined and contextualised for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century lives of C&YP from across the globe.

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of this report**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) commemorates its 30th anniversary in November 2019. In response, Amnesty International UK (AIUK) is commissioning a series of new books to enable knowledge and awareness of children's human rights as outlined in the UNCRC. The purpose of the books is for C &YP to better understand their rights and be empowered to claim them; and for adults to attain deeper understanding of C&YP as people with equal dignity and rights, who are entitled to respect and participation in all decisions that affect them (from internal AIUK project proposal, 2018).

To better inform the book's creation, AIUK commissioned research with the Open University's Children's Research Centre (OUCRC) in Milton Keynes to engage with and listen to children and young people and their views on rights. This report presents the findings of this work and includes: a summary of the participating C&YP's demographics; their responses to and representations of children's rights; an overview of the activities they engaged in to explore children's rights; and the themes that emerged across the nine component projects.

### **The Open University's Children's Research Centre (OUCRC)**

The Children's Research Centre was established in 2004 by Professor Mary Kellett to support C&YP to undertake their own research. It was the first university centre of its kind to support children and young people to undertake their own research. The impetus for the Centre can be traced back to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that children are the 'experts' of their own lives and they have the right to participate in everything that has impact on them.

The OUCRC's primary objective is to empower C&YP as active researchers. It values the multi-layered perspectives that C&YP bring to the research process, and it supports them to carry out research on topics that are important to them.

### **Amnesty International UK (AIUK)**

As a global movement of over 7 million people, Amnesty International is the world's largest grassroots human rights organisation. It investigates and exposes abuses, educates and mobilises the public, and helps transform societies to create a safer, more just world. It received the Nobel Peace Prize for its life-saving work.

Its objectives in developing these new books on child rights are twofold: firstly that C &YP are better able to know, understand and claim their rights; secondly, that adults know how to enable children to claim their rights.

### **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The UNCRC emerged out of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). As a direct result of the atrocities of the Second World War, the UDHR held countries to

account for their words, actions, laws and policies, and set a framework for humankind, worldwide, for lives to be lived by the fundamental principle that all people, regardless of race, religion, should be treated equally and respectfully (UNICEF, 2019a). The path to the UNCRC was long and set against a climate of global inequality and a lack of access for many C&YP to education, basic healthcare and social provision. The UNCRC was the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate a full range of human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social. Not simply the property of their parents, nor the helpless victims of charity, children were recognised as human beings with rights (UNICEF, 1989). The Convention offers a vision of children as competent and capable individuals with rights appropriate to their age and stage of development, but it also has a holistic focus that takes account of the fact that people under the age of 18 often need special care and protection (Landsdown, 2011).

The UNCRC sets out 54 articles. The first 42 outline the rights that all children should enjoy for a safe, happy and healthy life; the remaining 12 highlight the roles and responsibilities of government and adults to ensure these rights are upheld. All rights are interconnected and all are equally important. There are three main themes to the Convention, commonly called the 'three Ps':

- **The right to provision**, including rights to healthcare, education and the right to play;
- **The right to protection** from abuse and neglect, including protection and care in the best interests of the child;
- **The right to participation**, including rights to freedom of expression and information, and the right to express their views.

Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 are often referred to as the 'general principles' because they apply to all of the other rights:

- **Article 2.** Non-discrimination
- **Article 3.** Best interests of the child
- **Article 6.** The right to life, survival and development
- **Article 12.** Respect for the views of the child

## The research project

Amnesty International identified the impact they want these new books to have:

- *'We want all children and young people to feel more knowledgeable, stronger, braver, safer, and more hopeful.'*
- *'We want the book to include and reflect the UNCRC rights that children and young people think are most relevant and that matter most to children and young people now.'*

These statements informed the key aims of this research which was to provide opportunities C&YP to build narratives about 'my rights', using a range of multimodal activities as stimuli for conversation.

## Research approach

### *Participants*

The research directly involved 114 C&YP with a further 100 indirectly involved through a school-based child-led research project. There were 8 children in the age range three to four years old, 102 five to 13 year olds, and 4 young people aged 18 to 22. Each of the nine component projects involved a diverse range of participants, including children from rural communities and those living in urban and peri-urban environments; children from low socio-economic backgrounds; children from ethnic minority communities; children with learning difficulties; children from vulnerable groups; and care-experienced children and young people.

### *Children and young people project settings*

The children and young people who participated in this research were recruited through schools, national youth organisations, UNICEF Rights Respecting schools, rights-based charities, cultural organisations, and advocacy groups. The nine project settings are not intended to be comprehensive or a representative sample of all C&YPs views. Instead, this research offers a starting point of these C&YP's views and opinions, in order to draw out potential themes worthy of exploring with other children who will be involved in the book creation process.

*Table 1. Children and young people projects.*

Project type	County (UK Region)	Number of C&YP	Age range
Early Years setting	Herefordshire (England)	8	3 to 4
Rights respecting school	Kent (England)	6	5 to 6
		6	9 to 11
Rights respecting school	County Durham (England)	41	7 to 11
Theatre company	Nottinghamshire (England)	18	7 to 12
University-based children's rights centre	Swansea (Wales)	15	8 to 11
Inclusive theatre company	Greater London (England)	8	8 to 13
Rights respecting school	Southampton (England)	4	9 to 11
Advocacy group	Clywd (Wales)	4	12 to 13
Advocacy group	Cardiff (Wales)	4	18 to 22

## Research design

The overarching questions discussed in the sessions were as follows:

- Rights

- What rights would C&YP want to see in this book?
- What rights are most relevant to their lives?
- Representations
  - What images do C&YP find visually stimulating?
  - What makes C&YP dwell on a pictorial image?
- Responses
  - How does an image (e.g. about a right) make them feel?
  - How might they want an image (e.g. about a right) to make them feel?
  - Which images make children feel more knowledgeable, stronger, braver, safer and more hopeful?

Discussions around children's rights were prompted using Amnesty-sourced pictures and books, book talk, children's rights education resources, watching film clips, and photographs taken by the C&YP involved in the research.

### **Data collection methods**

C&YP engaged with the topic of rights through photographing examples of rights being upheld or denied, acting, writing and performing songs, drawing and making collages, bookmaking, undertaking research, discussing in groups and questioning others. C&YP took photographs to represent rights being upheld or denied and presented a wide range of images depicting love, family, and the rights to water, play, food and protection.

To support this process, C&YP were encouraged to discuss rights using the following broad prompts to stimulate discussion:

- Are there things in your life that do not feel fair?
- What or who stops you from doing things which are important to you?
- What might this right [*not necessarily using this term*] look like?
- How could you represent this right so that other children and young people can understand it?

The researchers kept in mind the following points, which were then considered for further reflection:

- What types of rights are referred to?
- Whose rights are represented?
- Whose rights might be missing?

#### *Picture-based discussion*

Picture-elicitation is recognised as a visual method that can enhance C&YP's participation in research and is responsive to childhood experiences (Cooper, 2017). This research was designed to use picture-making as a way to engage with C&YP and to explore rights, as experienced and given meaning by these C&YP. The study built upon previous research (Clark & Moss, 2011; Plowman & Stevenson, 2012; Kullman, 2012; Cooper, 2017), which uses pictures, including photographs and art-work as a way of connecting with C&YP and as a stimulus for conversation.

The picture-elicitation process included the following:

- C&YP were asked to use cameras to take photographs all about 'my rights', which were brought back to the group in follow-up sessions (Appendix A).
- C&YP were asked to draw images around a particular right that were later used as the stimulus for group discussions (Appendix B).
- C&YP were provided with a few illustrations to elicit discussions around rights based on Amnesty-sourced images and picture books (Appendix C).

The C&YP were asked to choose photos that they liked or considered needed further discussion, and then, in groups, explored their views about rights in more depth (Appendix D). Picture-elicitation discussions provided opportunities for the C&YP to build narratives about rights, using pictures as the stimulus.

## Ethics and collaborative research

Ethical considerations were embedded throughout the research process. The research ensured appropriate safeguarding procedures were in place prior to and while working with C&YP (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Participation of C&YP in this research was voluntary; they had the right to withdraw and choice to participate in any, some, or all of the sessions. With the commitment to carry out research in an ethically framed child-led approach, permission was obtained from the C&YP for their ideas, work, pictures, photographs and/or other data, to be shared beyond the workshop settings for the purposes of this research.

## Data analysis

### *Research themes*

Through the process of data analysis, four main research themes emerged – *Personal*, *Relational*, *Institutional* and *Global*. Table 2 outlines the four key themes that reflect the range of ways C&YP expressed their rights, at the different levels and the 36 related codes. The codes are listed under each of the four themes in order of frequency – from the most frequently occurring codes (at the top) to the least frequent (at the bottom).

*Table 2. The four research themes and the 36 codes used to categorise the C&YP's contributions.*

Personal	Relational	Institutional	Global
Expression and difference	Friendship	Safety and protection	Environment*
Play	Care	Equality, fairness and diversity	Nationality, country (separation)
Freedom	Home	Education and learning	Global politics
Happiness, fun	Family	Health and hygiene	War
Compassion	Bullying	Respect	
Love	Listen to	Non-discrimination	

	children		
Innocence		Food	
Dreams and goals		Inclusion	
Privacy		Social media	
Belongings and feelings		Choice	
		Gender equality and equity	
		Work	
		Race	
		Transport	
		Wealth and property	

\* The participants used the word 'environment', which included discussions on pollution, plastics, damaging earth/ environment, global warming, recycling, dropping litter out of the car, and cutting down trees and losing oxygen.

## Key findings

Across the four themes, the six most frequently occurring codes were: expression and difference; safety and protection; equality, fairness and diversity; education and learning; health and hygiene; and environment. The data from these codes aligned with the following 13 UNCRC Articles (Appendix F):

- Article 2. Non-discrimination
- Article 8. Preservation of identity
- Article 9. Separation from parents
- Article 12. Respect for the views of the child
- Article 13. Freedom of expression
- Article 15. Freedom of association
- Article 17. Access to information; mass media
- Article 19. Protection from all forms of violence
- Article 24. Health and health services
- Article 28. Right to education
- Article 30. Children from minority or indigenous groups
- Article 34. Sexual exploitation
- Article 35. Abduction, sale and trafficking
- Article 38. War and armed conflicts

Throughout this report, the aim is to respect the voices of the C&YP through the direct use of quotations, rather than attempting to translate their intentions through the researchers' lens (Cooper, 2017). In addition, the majority of captions accompanying the pictures in the report have

been generated by the C&YP themselves (identified through the use of italics and quotation marks).

Each of the four research themes is discussed in turn, referencing C&YP's own words, images, and pictures.

## Personal

C&YP referred to rights from personal or individual perspectives. When reflecting on rights in their own lives, the C&YP commented that it is important to 'stand up for our own culture', 'to have an attitude', and 'to be heard'. There were discussions about where and which rights might be upheld and where rights are potentially denied.

Figure 1, 'What helps and what stops us from enjoying rights.'



Table 3. The codes associated with the 'Personal' theme, along with some indicative examples, their relative frequency across the data sets, and the relevant UNCRC articles.

Codes	Examples from data	Total number (max from a single source)	Relevant UNCRC article
<b>Expression and difference</b>	The right to believe what we want, free speech, vote, express, fly free, dance, hobby, to listen to others, to share ideas, to be different, the right to speak out to people, right to be me, right to be listened to and believed by others	53 (22)	Article 2. Non-discrimination Article 12. Respect for the views of the child Article 13. Freedom of expression Article 15. Freedom of association
<b>Play</b>	The park, to have toys, to play	14 (11)	Article 31. Leisure, play and culture
<b>Freedom</b>	To fly, freedom	13 (11)	Article 13. Freedom of expression Article 31. Leisure, play and culture
<b>Happiness, fun</b>	The right to be stupid and funny, to smile, feel happy	12 (7)	Article 31. Leisure, play and culture
<b>Compassion</b>	Charity, kind, respectful	10 (8)	Article 2. Non-



			discrimination
<b>Love</b>	Right to love	9 (7)	Article 7. Registration, name, nationality, care
<b>Innocence</b>		5 (4)	
<b>Dreams and goals</b>	Imagination, dreaming about stuff that is important to us, hopes, light at the end of tunnel	4 (3)	Article 12. Respect for the views of the child
<b>Privacy</b>	Keeping things private, right to be with one's self and not with other people	3 (3)	Article 16. Right to privacy
<b>Belonging and feelings</b>	Empathy, relate to situations, expressions of preferences	1 (1)	Article 7. Registration, name, nationality, care

Even when the C&YP discussed rights from their own embodied perspectives, they also considered them from the universal perspective and wider experience of all C&YP evidenced their use of pronouns suggesting an 'us' rather than a 'me'.



Figure 2: 'We brought in photos to show what is important to us. This one shows love.'

The C&YP made it clear in a variety of ways that the importance of children's rights was that it made them feel 'safe, healthy and happy'. They often associated the term 'rights' with 'fair' and 'fairness', as well as with 'right' and 'not right'. One of the participants said, 'Children's rights mean a lot to me because I can go to school, because I can learn. If we didn't have rights, I wouldn't be happy.' Another child said, 'If [the] world didn't have children's rights it would be a bad world.'



Figure 3. 'Not allowed to play or even sleep – children's rights ruined.'

The C&YP discussed the right 'to lose' as well as 'to win', while emphasising participation and having the chance to experience fair play. The right to expression and difference was another prevailing theme, which includes the right to express an opinion, to have a say, to say 'no', to make choices, to look how they want, to defend oneself, to follow one's own culture, to live life the way they want, to have an attitude, and to be oneself. One participant said, 'You don't always have the right to paint everyone with the same brush,' – which highlights the importance of celebrating the diversity of children's experiences.

In response to discussion about existing rights, a group of marginalised young people devised their own rights making visible the issues specific to their lives. The list of rights they would wish for themselves included, 'the right to be a teenager', 'the right to follow your own culture', 'the right to say "No"' and 'the right to look how we want'. In presenting these rights, the C&YP make visible where current rights are denied, 'We have the right to an attitude' (Appendix E).

Several C&YP connected the Amnesty-sourced resources (Appendix C) either with a 'sense of happiness' and 'strength' or with a sense of 'not being right' and 'unfair'. Across the 22 images, the C&YP favoured the positive images of happiness; several groups indicated that they liked pictures that had a storytelling element to them (especially superheroes, magical and cartoon images). Other groups thought images of rights not being respected were more powerful. When responding to a short rights-awareness film on YouTube ('Everyone has rights', a short film by 4 Dublin Comhairli), the group of 8 participants highlighted the importance of the film being made by children for children, because 'they know what children want from a video'.

In discussions about rights, C&YP responded to big questions (a term used by the project facilitator) with sensitivity and insight, and were able to pose their own questions (both verbal and written), such as 'Do you think children are kinder than adults?' and 'What would be the biggest new idea?' The group involved in the child-led project categorised questions into two groups; firstly, 'top of the head questions', those that are easy to answer, for example, 'What food could you eat all day?' and secondly, 'deep, personal questions', those that require more thought, for example, 'What is your view on climate change?'

When provided with workshop space to respond to the rights agenda, the C&YP exercised their right to give their own opinion. One girl stood her ground by insisting that others did not join in with her karaoke performance, while another kept football as the theme for her research topic rather than bending to the adult's direction that her project should be on more formal rights: 'I am doing rights, it's my right to express an opinion.'

## **Relational**

The C&YP expressed their rights from a relational perspective, which illustrated how children's lives are closely nested in their relationships with other children and adults. A sense of 'togetherness' and 'belongingness' became apparent through the ways in which children articulated their rights from a relational perspective. After reading the book *Odd Dog Out* by Rob Biddulph, one child said: *'It doesn't matter what you wear or what colour your skin is, or if you wear glasses or not; we are all the same inside, the outside looks different but inside we're just humans.'* The previous Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman (2014) stressed the important role that books have in supporting

C&YP's understanding of the world, 'Reading is an exercise in empathy; an exercise in walking in someone else's shoes for a while'.



Figure 4. 'This picture is about everyone ignoring the person in the middle and thinking he is not good enough.'

Table 4. The codes associated with the 'relational' theme, along with some indicative examples, their relative frequency across the data sets, and the relevant UNCRC articles.

Codes	Examples from data	Total number (max from a single source)	Relevant UNCRC article
<b>Friendship</b>	To have friends, to choose own friends	15 (13)	Article 15. Freedom of association
<b>Care</b>	Right to be cared for by family, school	13 (10)	Article 25. Review of treatment in care
<b>Home</b>	Right to safe place, better support for homeless, right to shelter, to be secure, to live	13 (8)	Article 10. Family reunification
<b>Family</b>	Safe, love	12 (12)	Article 10. Family reunification
<b>Bullying</b>	Race bullying, people in power	6 (5)	Article 19. Protection from all forms of violence
<b>Listen to children</b>	Right to share ideas, right not to be alone	2 (2)	Article 12. Respect for the views of the child

Cross-referencing across rights was also a feature in discussions. For example, one child said, 'The right to a healthy environment can be achieved if the right to be treated fairly is respected.' Another child considered the 'right to learn' important to become a teacher, while C&YP from a geographical context where 'good' jobs were scarce associated learning with getting a good job and having a more economically secure life in the future. Children's experience of education and parental aspirations may vary a lot. Some children may experience a conflict between aspirations by their family and/or community and their own personal aspirations.

Friendship was a very important emerging theme, and C&YP particularly liked pictures of children with friends from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The recent report from CLPE (2018) *Reflecting Realities* stresses the need for books to better reflect the diversity of C&YP's lives: only 4% of children's books published in 2017 featured BAME characters (p. 5). The C&YP also commented on positive images about disability, for example highlighting those children with disabilities who 'can do anything' and 'should not be held back'. One girl with disabilities expressed her right to participate by sharing her favourite song with her research group. The song, while collaborative in nature, was presented as a solo performance and the girl was quite specific that she would complete the song by herself, thus exercising her own right to participate in the research on her own terms.

One child took a picture of a light bulb to illustrate that everyone should be able to express his or her ideas.



Figure 5. 'This shows that we all have the right to share our ideas with each other and speak for ourselves.'

Many of the 8 children in the photo elicitation project took photos of books to represent the right to education and to go to school. They were aware that many children do not get the opportunity to have an education. Several children brought a picture of their home (or a dollhouse) to show that everyone has a right to have a home, to have shelter and to be secure. They expressed their concern that many people in this world are homeless. They also brought pictures of a lock to show the right to privacy; rubbish bins to illustrate the right to a safe environment; and pictures of a tap, a sink and a bath to demonstrate the right to have personal hygiene.

A number of the children attending a UNICEF Rights Respecting school were very aware of their own and others' rights.



Figure 6. 'Everyone should know about their rights. In our school we promote our rights.'

This prior knowledge of the UNCRC helped the children's positioning of the shared images and books and this was expressed by one child: 'No matter what, there is light at the end of the tunnel in every child's life, because there will always be something good they can tell about.'

Children expressed their future concerns and worries related to rights, notably the difficulty in getting jobs and the impact on their families of not having access to money. They also spoke of barriers to children being able to access their rights – identifying a lack of knowledge about rights and the need for children and professionals working with them to have knowledge about children's rights. One young person commented: 'Listen to children and young people – we have important things to say.'

There were three consistent and strong threads in the relational theme across all projects: the right to family, the right to friends and the right to be loved. From the selection of illustrations provided, the C&YP discussed the importance of family, the right to be safe, to be loved, to be strong, to be creative and – among others – the right to 'be everything you want to be when you grow up'. In addition, C&YP expressed the right for children to have an opinion: 'Every child has the right to speak out to people.'



Figure 7. 'This picture shows wrong things happening which we wanted to change.'

## Institutional

The responses of C&YP about their rights often moved from the personal and relational to a more institutional perspective. They showed awareness about the responsibility of social institutions in ensuring children's rights are protected. For example, one child expressed: 'If I am not living with my family, people should keep checking if I am safe and happy.'

The institutional theme overall captures children's expressions of rights which relates to educational, social, religious and community institutions, along with the cultural practices that prevail in their society.

Table 5. The codes associated with the 'institutional' theme, along with some indicative examples, their relative frequency across the data sets, and the relevant UNCRC articles.

Codes	Examples from data	Total number (max from a single source)	Relevant UNCRC article
<b>Safety and protection</b>	To have shelter, to be secure, right not to be exploited, not to be moved on, right to be safe, to walk down the road without being abused, to be safe from war, to be safe from fear, not to be separated	48 (21)	Article 9. Separation from parents. Article 19. Protection from all forms of violence Article 34. Sexual exploitation Article 35. Abduction, sale and trafficking Article 38. War and armed conflicts

<b>Equality, fairness, and diversity</b>	To be fair, to be treated fairly, right to be different, we all are different anyway, no discrimination, equal amounts, to be who we are and who we choose to be, right to be creative, diversity, we are all the same	29 (13)	Article 8. Preservation of identity Article 30. Children from minority or indigenous groups
<b>Education and learning</b>	Right to learn, read books, school, higher cost of HE, information, study, be included	25 (12)	Article 17. Access to information; mass media Article 28. Right to education
<b>Health and hygiene</b>	To be clean, access to water, toilet	23 (10)	Article 24. Health and health services
<b>Respect</b>	Right to respect other's religion, the right to say no, have your say, It does not matter what religion you are we all connect	15 (9)	Article 14. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
<b>Non-discrimination</b>	Breaks down barriers	12 (8)	Article 2. Non-discrimination
<b>Food</b>	Right to eat and drink, to be healthy, right to eat the right amount	8 (3)	Article 6. Life, survival and development
<b>Inclusion</b>	Right to be included, right to feel wanted, not to be separated, not to be moved on	7 (6)	Article 2. Non-discrimination Article 9. Separation from parents
<b>Social media</b>	Right to use social media, to enjoy and to play with friends, not to use in wrong way	7 (3)	Article 17. Access to information; mass media
<b>Choice</b>	Right to choose the subject to learn	6 (3)	Article 12. Respect for the views of the child Article 13. Freedom of expression
<b>Gender equity and equality</b>	Sexism, every human is equal, women shouldn't be paid less	5 (3)	Article 2. Non-discrimination
<b>Work</b>	Right not to do dangerous work	3 (3)	Article 32. Child labour
<b>Race</b>	Race bullying	2 (2)	Article 2. Non-discrimination
<b>Transport</b>	Right to travel, to have transportation	2 (1)	
<b>Wealth and property</b>	Money	2 (2)	Article 6. Life, survival and development

Many children articulated their right not to do dangerous work, and some young women expressed their right to work. While some children said they have the right to religion, others said they have the right not to have any religion. The concept of fairness dominated children's accounts as they mentioned 'the right to be treated fairly' in relation to power, governance, equality and diversity.



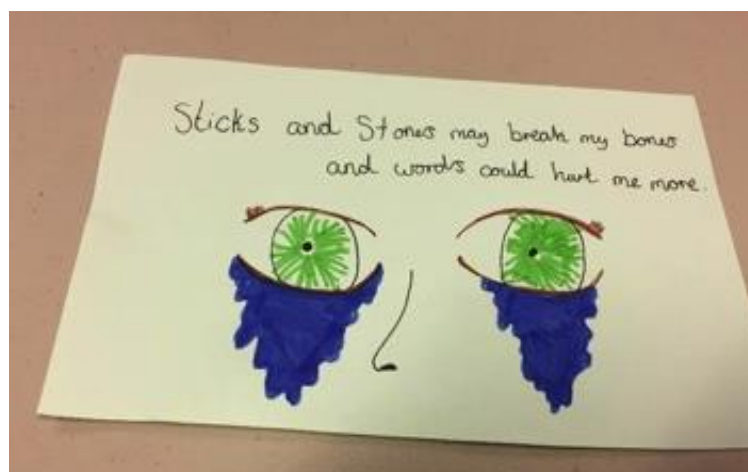


Figure 8. 'Sticks and Stones. This shows that not only falling over and hurting yourself can hurt you but hard and horrible words can hurt you more.'

One child said: 'So I think that this country and all countries should be run not only in an ethical way but in a fair way.' Another participant said: 'Bullies are people in power – it's like a game, and it's not fair. Everything is very one-sided at the moment – it's a bit like having five players on one team and only two on the other and saying that's fair.' Bullying was also used as an explanation for racist behaviour – 'racism is a very deep form of bullying'. The dangers of cyber-bullying were also referred to in relation to the inappropriate use of social media. However, the C&YP were also realistic about the challenges of tackling this issue: 'You can't make a change in one day.'

C&YP spoke about their concerns about having to pay for higher education, which they believed limits their right to an education. They expressed concerns about prevailing social inequalities and the influence of these on their aspirations for higher education, as the high cost made it inaccessible to many young people, particularly care-experienced young people. They articulated that being able to access higher education should be a right for all young people, whatever their family background and circumstances.

Equality was another concept that dominated children's discussions. One child said: 'No matter who you are, how old, or where you come from, you should be treated the same. We [children] are all the same.' Institutions have their own part to play in ensuring that rights, as viewed by the C&YP, are upheld: 'We have the right for Police to believe us and to be heard.' C&YP who have experienced marginalisation spoke of rights in relation to an expectation of others: 'We should have the right to do everything like normal people do.' 'We should have the right to walk around the road without getting called names.'

The right to healthcare and access to medication was considered a significant right, with some participants speaking from personal experience about the impact of their own health issues and those of family members, and how they 'wouldn't be alive without these rights'. Other children spoke of the importance of the right to access water.





Figure 9. 'This picture shows children have rights to have a bath.'

C&YP felt that play and leisure services were not equally accessible for all children and that children were less able to access their rights under Article 31 if they lived in a rural area, a long way from facilities, or if they were living in a family that could not afford to pay for leisure activities or the transport to access these services.

## Global

C&YP often positioned themselves in the global landscape and discussed their rights from a broader geopolitical perspective. The frequent narrative was that adults make decisions that adversely affect the lives of C&YP, leading to conversations about what is fair/not fair.

Table 6. The codes associated with the 'global' theme, along with some indicative examples, their relative frequency across the data sets, and the relevant UNCRC articles.

Codes	Examples from data	Total number (max from a single source)	Relevant UNCRC article
<b>Environment</b>	Pollution, global warming, recycling	22 (9)	Article 24. Health and health services
<b>Nationality, country (separation)</b>	Separation	8 (5)	Article 9. Separation from parents.
<b>Global politics</b>	Brexit, Trump and US Govt. locking up Mexican children	7 (5)	Article 22. Refugee children Article 36. Other forms of exploitation
<b>War</b>	Child soldiers	6 (4)	Article 38. War and armed conflicts

The environment was frequently given as an example of how the decisions made by previous generations were affecting the daily lives of C&YP. The word 'environment' was used in and included discussions about pollution, plastics, damaging earth/ environment, global warming, recycling, dropping litter out of the car, and cutting down trees and losing oxygen. In particular, mention was made of the importance of respecting the environment through action by 'recycling', 'stop[ping] the use of plastic' and 'wasting rubbish in the water'. C&YP used metaphors to better explain their concerns about global rights being denied or flouted. One child spoke of the effect on the environment by humans: 'There's a whole island as big as Texas made of plastic.' Bullying was also used as a metaphor to explain environmental concerns: 'They're like bullies basically, polluting the earth, they don't care about anybody.'

When looking at an illustration by Marie Louise Fitzpatrick in her book *I am, I* of children on either side of barbed wire, C&YP commented that being behind barbed wire is not fair and is not right. This was in relation to news items at the time of the research highlighting the family separation policy operating along the US-Mexico border. In order to express his concerns about this policy, one boy performed a song he'd written 'about refugees and their human rights'. Another child shared a poem she had written, which was inspired by the experience of homeless families.

C&YP also expressed their rights through their views on politics; for example, child-led research into the views of Year 6 pupils asked whether Britain is a fair country. The responses of these children suggested that Britain 'isn't as fair as they'd like to be' and that 'kids and normal people should have more of a say about what happens in Parliament'. The impact of children carrying out research with other children was also felt to have an impact on other children's understandings of rights. One boy commented, 'When you're older you need to know about rights, so I helped them. You get taught by an adult every day, but you [like] might remember when it's by a child because it's a little bit different.' This notion of children having views that are not always represented was reflected in another boy's comment: 'It would be good to seek children's views because then you can understand where other people are coming from.'

As reflected in the personal theme, C&YP often expressed their experiences from the point of view of 'us' rather than 'me'. This was particularly true when considering the way that global perspectives reflected in the personal and everyday lives of C&YP. While discussing the rights C&YP have, they also expressed awareness about their responsibilities as future duty bearers. One of the participants said: 'Children's rights mean a lot to me because when I grow up and become an adult I will know what children should have not to have.' In a similar vein, another child expressed: 'If [the] world didn't have children's rights, it would be a bad world.'

## **Reflections on visual images and book talk**

A key strand of this research was to better understand the types of visual images C&YP are attracted to and responsive to. Book covers and visuals that were openly ambiguous and open ended were the ones that triggered more thinking and thus more conversation. The visuals often created a rich conversation among the children, and for some C&YP the covers were more important than the stories inside.

In an early-years setting, children between three and four years of age were able to express what they liked/disliked about the images in age-appropriate storybooks with 'rights' messages. Although the 'right' was clear to the adults, the children did not always pick up on it and focused instead on the simple story narrative. The same younger children showed little interest in the images that contained quite a lot of information. They were most often unable to articulate what they meant when they were unable to relate to situations in the images.

Older C&YP were more able to express empathy with the characters in the books. They often put themselves in the shoes of the protagonist and were able to discuss what the characters were feeling, while also offering solutions to the problems that the characters faced. In response to the book *Footpath Flowers* by JonArno Lawson and Sydney Smith, one girl said:

*'I really like the way that the kid is always sharing. It feels so nice to know that you can just brighten up someone's day with just a flower. It's just so like wow!'*

*'Like when I'm so sad, my brother came round and gave me this teddy. And he was like here. And I was like no, that's so sweet. And that makes me, and that made me cry later. And this book makes me cry because the kid is sharing love.'*

C&YP were able to understand the message of stories by just looking at the pictures. One girl said, 'You know the story because you can see the kid. Because you can see the pictures...' In discussing the book *So Much!* by Trish Cooke, one boy said:

*'This expresses my family, because it's kind of, it's all the things that my family like to do together. We like to cook together, we like to eat together, and we like to play together. We like to just be together because we love each other so much.'*

Another boy said of the same book, 'home is where the heart is'. Whilst another boy connected the book with 'The right to learn'; while from an adult's perspective this might be presumed as the right to learn about families, this six-year old boy in the research saw it from the baby's point of view and said, 'he wants to learn to walk and talk so he can join in'. Children also associated activist and Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai's book *Malala's Magic Pencil* with 'The right to learn' as they thought that 'her pencil is going to help her learn'.

Looking at the cover of the book *Beyond the Fence* by Maria Gulemetova, one girl said she felt sorry for the pig, as 'he wants to go beyond the fence, but he can't'. This seems a very perceptive prediction from a young child from the visual in which the pig is very small. When asked why she thought this, she replied 'he is looking there and wants to go there – you can see him looking in hope'. Another child related *Rainbow Bear* by Michael Morpurgo with 'the right to a safe place to live – as he is afraid and might be hunted and the ice might melt'.

Children connected *On Sudden Hill* by Linda Sarah with 'the right to choose your friends', 'they want to be together and have fun', and 'the right to play and relax'. One girl articulated that the book *Beyond the Fence* by Maria Gulemetova was associated with 'the right to be treated fairly', while one boy described *Odd Dog Out* by Rob Biddulph as illustrating how we are all different and 'that's okay'. He also felt that the book was an example of the right to 'express [their] feelings'.

The Amnesty-sourced pictures also led to rich discussions about the representation of the image and its connection with the C&YP's own experiences. Children were asked to decide which of the words from *knowledgeable, confident, clearer, understanding, stronger, safer* and *hopeful* matched the different pictures. For example, in response to an illustration of the tennis player Serena Williams, in the book *Goodnight stories for rebel girls* by Francesca Cavallo and Elena Favilli; one child commented: 'I think it's hopeful... she is physically strong.' A girl agreed: 'I'd put it as hopeful, because she hopes that it doesn't matter if you're different, and that no one will judge her, she hopes.' Another child commented that the picture represents confidence.

The idea of connecting images to experience was also reflected in another child's association of the concept of knowledge with the image of an adult pouring water onto a child while the child himself pours water onto a plant. The child was responding to an image called *Grandir* created by illustrator Stephane Barroux. The child commented: 'I like this one as the letters on the girl's dress shows like knowledge and she's pouring it over to the boy, so the boy has the knowledge to see if the plant is dying, so he is using his knowledge.' Another child noted the same image as showing 'the right to learn and the right to be safe', while another child explained with simplicity that the picture shows 'someone is caring for him'.

Returning to the previously mentioned illustration of children either side of a piece of barbed wire (Marie Louise Fitzpatrick, *I am, I*), one child said, 'maybe they're stuck'. He went on to express his opinion that the children are not friends as 'they are glaring at each other... they're like angry'. The same illustration led to broader discussions about the importance of 'seeing the whole picture' when viewing an image. One girl said:

*'I think in that picture I feel like this kid might actually only be angry, because this one's like showing off and it's like ha, I made it and you didn't. And this kid is like um I want to make it through. But maybe they could just, maybe there's, because we're not seeing the whole picture, because we can see that there's barbed wire round here, but what are those people protecting like them through going through there.'*

## Conclusion

### *What matters to children and young people about rights*

The emerging findings of this research reflect C&YP's knowledge and experiences of rights in the 21st century. The findings from across the nine component projects illustrate the intertwined relationships across the various articles of the UNCRC. C&YP in this study understood rights as active entitlement that changes over time and according to age and context. The accounts of C&YP shed light on the evolving nature of their understanding of the concepts of rights, and how they may not recognise their own individual rights embodied in the UNCRC. Children and young people are attracted to and responsive to images that promise change, possibility and potential empowerment, in contrast to their reactions to images of segregation or rights denied. C&YP see themselves as future bearers of rights, either through their own future actions or through their role as information holders for other children and young people.

## Recommendations

The proposed books have an ambitious agenda: to encourage C&YP from across the globe to notice, pick up, interact with and learn from them. This initial research draws on the knowledge, understanding and experiences of a small group of C&YP from England and Wales, some of who are already rights aware. Consequently, the publisher and book creators need to explore the ways in which C&YP from different *book experienced* cultures and those who are non-readers might be invited to interact with the books and appreciate the key messages.

As a result of this research, the key recommendations to publishers and book creators includes:

- keep the core audience of C&YP at the heart of the book creation process;
- reflect the intertwined nature of rights as exemplified by these C&YP and as conceptualised by the original authors of the UNCRC;
- focus on the different ways the books might represent the four research themes: *Personal, Relational, Institutional* and *Global*;
- reflect the most frequently referenced themes and associated rights from this research: expression and difference; safety and protection; equality, fairness and diversity; education and learning; health and hygiene; and environment;
- use images that reflect both rights denied and rights upheld and include images that suggest change and possibility;
- focus on images that represent positive depictions of family life, and difference, and which highlight equity and diversity;
- find ways of engaging with C&YP's use of metaphor to exemplify nuanced responses to the narrative and representation of rights.

The aim of this research was to listen to and hear what children and young people say when they talk about rights and how these views might be best captured and represented. By ensuring these voices continue to be consulted and reflected throughout the book creation process from inception to publication, it will be possible to meet AIUK's overarching aim:

*'As a result of reading these books, we want all children and young people to feel more knowledgeable, stronger, braver, safer, and more hopeful.'*

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**Our thanks** to the children and young people in the following projects and to their project leads

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Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. If any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: My rights in photographs



Figure 2: 'We brought in photos to show what is important to us. This one shows love.'



Figure 3: 'Not allowed to play or even sleep – children's rights ruined.'

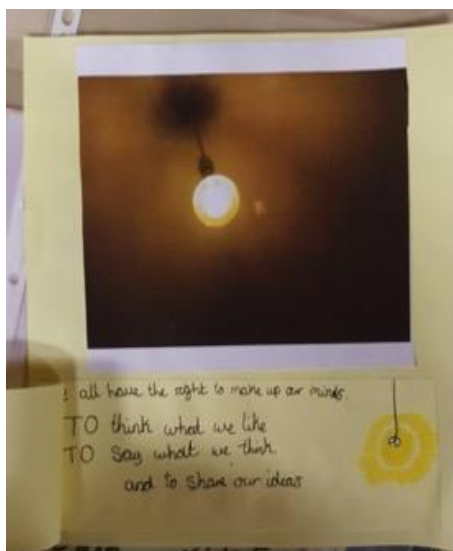


Figure 5: 'This shows that we all have the right to share our ideas with each other and speak for ourselves.'





Figure 6. 'Everyone should know about their rights. In our school we promote our rights.'



Figure 7. 'This picture shows wrong things happening which we wanted to change.'

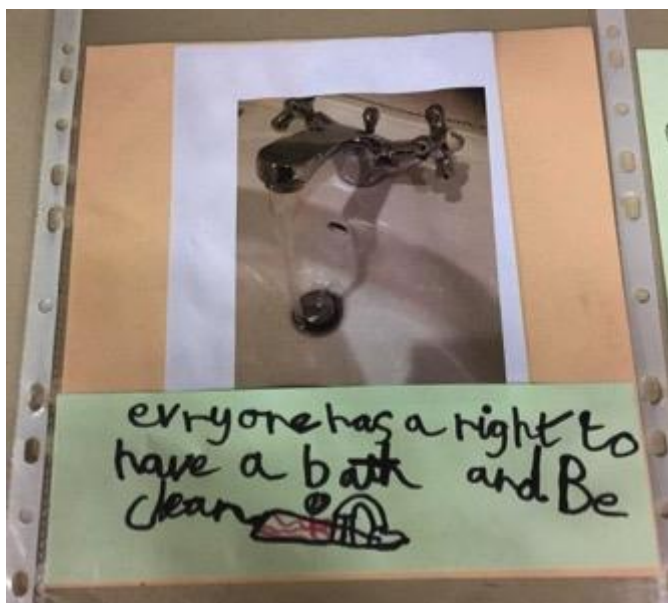


Figure 9. 'This picture shows children have rights to have a bath.'

## Appendix B: My rights in pictures



Figure 4. 'This picture is about everyone ignoring the person in the middle and thinking he is not good enough.'

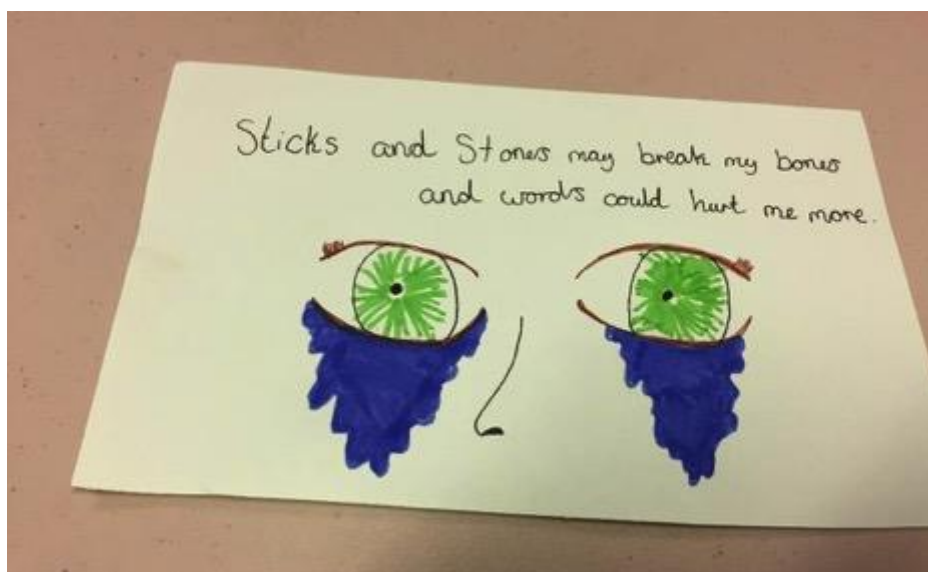


Figure 8. 'Sticks and Stones. This shows that not only falling over and hurting yourself can hurt you but hard and horrible words can hurt you more.'

## Appendix C: Amnesty-sourced picture books

- *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan
- *So Much!* by Trish Cooke, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury
- *There's a bear on my chair* by Ross Collins
- *Odd Dog Out* by Rob Biddulph
- *I have a right to be a child* by Alain Serres, illustrated by Aurelia Fronty
- *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna
- *There is a Tribe of Kids* by Lane Smith
- *Footpath Flowers* by JonArno Lawson, illustrated by Sydney Smith

In addition, a few other books were used:

- *Beyond the Fence* by Maria Gulemetova
- *Welcome* by Barroux
- *On Sudden Hill* by Linda Sarah and Benji Davies
- *The Rainbow Bear* by Michael Morpurgo, illustrated by Michael Foreman
- *Malala's Magic Pencil* by Malala Yousafzai, illustrated by Kerascoët

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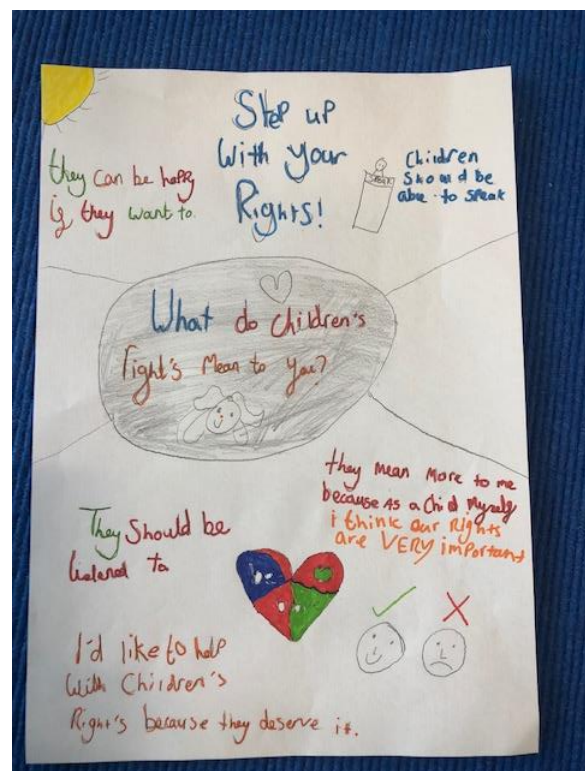


Figure 10. C&YP respond 'What do children's rights mean to you?'

## **Appendix E: List of rights that should be awarded**

### **You have a right ...**

You have a right to be a teenager

You have the right to support

You have the right to defend yourself

You have the right to say what you want

You have the right to respect

You have the right to freedom

You have the right to an education

You have the right to make choices

You have the right to a home

You have the right to say 'No'

You have the right to be heard

You have the right to health

You have the right to follow your culture

You have the right to fun

We have the right to be looked after

We have the right to our religion

We have the right to look how we want

Traveller women have the right to work



We have the right to have an attitude

We always have rights like everyone else cus we are all God's children so no matter what..

We have the right to be heard

Everyone fight the battle – stand up and have your say

We should have the right to do everything like normal people do!

We have our right to have our say like everyone else

We should have right to walk around the road without getting called names

We always have the right to believe in ourself

Some places travellers do get towed away

We have the right to stand up and fight our battles

We should have the right to have an education

We have the right for teachers to believe us and to be heard

You don't always have the right to paint everyone with the same brush

We should have the right to live our lives the way we do

We have the right for the Police to believe us and to be heard

## Appendix F: Research codes connected to relevant articles from the UNCRC

Emerging themes				
Themes	Example quotes/references	Sources (no of times one theme appeared in one particular data source)	References (no of times one theme appeared in the entire data set)	Relevant UNCRC article
<i>Personal</i>				
Belonging and feeling		1	1	Article 7. Registration, name, nationality, care
Privacy		3	3	Article 16. Right to privacy
Dreams and goals	Imagination, dreaming about stuff that is important to us, hopes, light at the end of tunnel	3	4	Article 12. Respect for the views of the child
Innocence		4	5	
Love	Right to love	7	9	
Compassion	Charity, kind, respectful	8	10	Article 2. Non-discrimination
Happiness, fun	The right to be stupid and funny, to smile, feel happy	7	12	Article 31. Leisure, play and culture
Freedom	To fly, freedom	11	13	Article 13. Freedom of expression Article 31. Leisure, play and culture
Play	The park, to have toys, to play	11	14	Article 31. Leisure, play and culture
Expression and difference	The right to believe what we want, free speech, vote, express, fly free, dance, hobby, to listen to others, to share ideas, to be different, the right to speak out to people, right to be me, right to be listened to and believed by adults	22	53	Article 2. Non-discrimination Article 12. Respect for the views of the child Article 13. Freedom of expression Article 15. Freedom of association
<i>Relational</i>				
Listen to children	Right to share ideas, right not to be alone	2	2	Article 12. Respect for the views of the child

Emerging themes				
Themes	Example quotes/references	Sources (no of times one theme appeared in one particular data source)	References (no of times one theme appeared in the entire data set)	Relevant UNCRC article
Bullying	Race bullying, people in power	5	6	Article 19. Protection from all forms of violence
Family	Safe, love	12	12	Article 10. Family reunification
Care	Right to be cared for by family, school	10	13	Article 25. Review of treatment in care
Home	Right to safe place, better support for homeless, right to shelter, to be secure, to live	8	13	Article 10. Family reunification
Friendship	To have friends, to choose own friends	13	15	Article 15. Freedom of association
<i>Institutional</i>				
Wealth and property	Money	2	2	
Transport		1	2	
Race		2	2	Article 2. Non-discrimination
Work		3	3	
Gender equity and equality	Sexism, every human is equal, women shouldn't be paid less	3	5	Article 2. Non-discrimination
Choice		3	6	Article 12. Respect for the views of the child Article 13. Freedom of expression
Inclusion	Right to be included, right to feel wanted, not to be separated, not to be moved on	6	7	Article 2. Non-discrimination Article 9. Separation from parents
Social media		3	7	Article 17. Access to information; mass media
Food	Right to eat and drink, to be healthy, right to eat the right amount	3	8	Article 6. Life, survival and development
Non-discrimination	Breaks down barriers	8	12	Article 2. Non-discrimination



Emerging themes				
Themes	Example quotes/references	Sources (no of times one theme appeared in one particular data source)	References (no of times one theme appeared in the entire data set)	Relevant UNCRC article
Respect	Right to respect other's religion, the right to say no, have your say, It does not matter what religion you are we all connect	9	15	Article 14. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
Health and hygiene	To be clean, access to water, toilet	10	23	Article 24. Health and health services
Education and learning	Right to learn, read books, school, higher cost of HE, information, study, be included	12	25	Article 17. Access to information; mass media Article 28. Right to education
Equality, fairness and diversity	To be fair, to be treated fairly, right to be different, we all are different anyway, no discrimination, equal amounts, to be who we are and who we choose to be, right to be creative, diversity, we are all the same	13	29	Article 8. Preservation of identity Article 30. Children from minority or indigenous groups
Safety and protection	To have shelter, to be secure, right not to be exploited, not to be moved on, right to be safe, to be safe, to walk down the road without being abused, to be safe from war, to be safe from fear, not to be separated	21	48	Article 9: Separation from parents Article 19. Protection from all forms of violence Article 34. Sexual exploitation Article 35. Abduction, sale and trafficking Article 38. War and armed conflicts
<i>Global</i>				
War	Child soldiers	4	6	Article 38. War and armed conflicts
Global politics	Brexit, Trump and US Govt. locking up Mexican children	5	7	
Nationality, country (separation)	Separation	5	8	Article 7. Registration, name, nationality, care Article 9. Separation from parents Article 22. Refugee children

## Emerging themes

Themes	Example quotes/references	Sources (no of times one theme appeared in one particular data source)	References (no of times one theme appeared in the entire data set)	Relevant UNCRC article
Environment	Pollution, global warming, recycling	9	22	



If you have any questions about this report  
please contact the Children's Research Centre



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